**INTRODUCTION**

***Read Matthew 6:9-15 (The Lord’s Prayer)***

Focus verses:

*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

*Matthew 6:14-15 NIV*

…

*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

*1 John 1:8-9 NIV*

Despite receiving forgiveness and enjoying salvation, believers will still fall into sin. Where it is confessed and there is repentance (turning from sin), believers can receive forgiveness; their sin is taken away by Christ and it is as if the sin had never been committed in God’s eyes.

…

Matthew 6:14-15 teaches us, as a **forgiven** person must in turn be a **forgiving** person.

If we refuse to forgive, our sins will not be forgiven.

...

**WHAT DOES TO "FORGIVE" MEAN?**

To “forgive” commonly means granting pardon, remission, a ceasing of demonstrating resentment.

The Greek word used in Matt 6 is *aphiemi* – a sending, putting or taking away, removing permanently and thoroughly.

***Read Leviticus 16:20-22***

For the removal of people's sins the Jews would put all their sins upon a goat and release it into wild to literally take away their sins. (where we get the phrase "scapegoat" from)

Jesus takes away the sin of world (see John 1:29).

As we forgive, God wants us to thoroughly remove the offence and send it away. He wants us to forgive thoroughly and completely.

Forgiveness is not condoning or excusing bad behavior. Consequences may flow such as trust needing to be rebuilt.

...

**WHO ARE WE TO FORGIVE?**

WE ARE TO FORGIVE ENEMIES

***Read Matthew 5:43-45a***

(Note: we do not earn the status of child of God; we are made such by God in his mercy and grace, but we are to act in accordance with what we are)

Prayer is key in loving and in turn forgive our enemies.

**Examples in the Bible:**

* Jesus on the cross (see Luke 23:33-34)
* Stephen before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:59-60)

**Corrie Ten Boom**

Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch Christian who, with her family, hid Jews from the Nazis during the Second World War. She and her father and sister were arrested. Her father died in custody. Corrie and her sister Betsie were taken to Ravensbrück Concentration Camp, where Betsie died. After the war Corrie travelled around preaching a message of forgiveness. One of the former guards, who had become a Christian, attended a meeting in Germany and approached Corrie and asked for her forgiveness. At first Corrie could not bring herself to forgive him, but as she prayed she was enabled to forgive him.

Prayer puts the other person/situation into the Father's hands.

...

WE ARE TO FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

Jesus knows believers will disagree, fall out and let one another down.

We need to forgive for the sake of our own forgiveness.

Also the unity and love between believers enables the world to know why Jesus came and validates our claim to be his disciples (see John 13:34-35 and 17:21-23).

***Read the “Parable of the Wicked Servant” (Matthew 18:21-35)***

We are to continue to forgive one another and not keep score.

The servant’s debt in the parable was unpayable.

The fellow servant’s debt was still substantial, but miniscule compared to the debt the first servant had had cancelled.

This parable is a picture of the enormity of the price God the Father paid in sending his Son to die in our place. He wants us to see the offences of others we need to forgive in the context of the offence we have caused him by our sin.

…

THE EXAMPLE OF THE BOOK OF JONAH

* Jonah is called to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh (in Assyria).
* Jonah refuses and travels in the opposite direction by sea.
* God causes Jonah to go overboard and he is swallowed by a giant fish; he stays within the belly of the fish for three days and is then vomited up back where he started.
* Jonah is again called by God and goes to Nineveh and preaches the message of repentance.
* The Ninevites repent of their sin and turn to the Lord.
* Jonah is angry at the mercy God is showing to Israel’s enemies and wishes to die.

God says:

*“And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left – and also many animals?*

*Jonah 4:11 NIV*

God wants us to have a heart like his for enemies, for strangers, for those we are close to - to everyone.

…

WE ARE TO FORGIVE OURSELVES

We must allow room to forgive ourselves for the wrongs we have done. There may be consequences we have to bear and we will likely experience feelings of remorse and guilt, but as we confess our sins and repent we can know that we no longer have to, and should not, carry feelings of condemnation; we have right-standing with God and can experience his freedom.

…

**THE PROCESS OF FORGIVENESS**

Where we need to forgive others or ourselves, there is a process and this may take time to work through. We may wrestle with our feelings and the circumstances caused by the actions of others or ourselves.

Do not allow “unforgiveness” to ever be your “final answer”. We cannot afford to be unforgiving people.

…

**QUESTIONS FOR GROUP/PERSONAL STUDY**

1. In the Lord’s prayer verses (Matthew 6:9-15), why do you think Jesus took the time to highlight and elaborate on our forgiveness of others and not the other aspects?
2. Is there anything else other than our unforgiveness of others that prevents us from receiving God’s forgiveness?
3. Can you think of times when someone did you a great wrong, but you struggled to find it in yourself to forgive them? How did they make you feel?
4. How does praying for someone help you to forgive them?
5. In the Parable of the Wicked Servant (Matthew 18:21-35), how should the servant have treated his fellow servant who owed him a not insubstantial sum of money?
6. In the Parable, do you think the master was justified in putting his servant in prison? Should he have had mercy on him a second time?
7. Think about the story of Jonah in the round – why did God give Jonah a second chance to preach repentance to the Ninevites? Why was Jonah angry at God for showing mercy to the Ninevites?
8. Take some time to consider any situations where there is a need for forgiveness – it may be for something that happened many years ago. Take some time to name those who need forgiving before God and ask him to help you with the feelings surrounding this. If you need help with anything that has been considered on this topic, please do ask for help from the elders or a fellow Christian.